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ABSTRACT

This review on the language experience approach to reading instruction for the culturally disadvantaged is one of the reading information series, designed to review the past, assess the present, and predict the future of reading education. The target audience are those with specific professional interests and needs: researchers, professors, and doctoral students. The first section reviews past research reviews and outstanding research studies. Then a synthesis is worked out by examining the research from a critical viewpoint, assessing knowledge, and considering limitations in both coverage and research methodology. Topics treated in the synthesis section are achievement, readiness, creative writing, spelling, oral language development, student attitudes, teacher attitudes, and research methodology. The third section makes recommendations and points out particular needs in the area for future research. A bibliography is included. (AW)

ED 058 468

THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH FOR THE CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED

MaryAnne Hall

AA 000 772

ec+ira

Reading Information Series
WHERE DO WE GO?

1

The Language Experience Approach For The Culturally Disadvantaged

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Reading Information Series: WHERE DO WE GO?
1972

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This new series from ERIC/CRIER+IRA is designed to review the past, assess the present, and predict the future. The second publication in this series reflects the continued careful and thoughtful development of the series by Dr. Richard A. Earle.

James L. Laffey
Director of ERIC/CRIER

The International Reading Association attempts, through its publications to provide a forum for a wide spectrum of opinion on reading. This policy permits divergent viewpoints without assuming the endorsement of the Association.

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Foreword

ERIC/CRIER and IRA are concerned with several types of information analysis and their dissemination to audiences with specific professional needs. Among these is the producer of research—the research specialist, the college professor, the doctoral student. It is primarily to this audience that the present series is directed, although others may find it useful as well. Therefore, the focus will rest clearly on the *extension* of research and development activities: "Where do we go?" Our intent is not to provide a series of exhaustive reviews of literature. Nor do we intend to publish definitive statements which will meet with unanimous approval. Rather, we solicit and present the thoughtful recommendations of those researchers whose experience and expertise has led them to firm and well-considered positions on problems in reading research.

The purpose of this series of publications is to strengthen the research which is produced in reading education. We believe that the series will contribute helpful perspectives on the research literature and stimulating suggestions to those who perform research in reading and related fields.

Richard A. Earle
Series Editor

Introduction

In the decade of the sixties much was written about the language experience approach to reading and much was written also about reading and the disadvantaged.

The rationale for using the language experience approach with the disadvantaged is based on psychological and linguistic considerations. Psychologically, the factors of success, motivation, and attitude, which have a favorable effect on self-concept and achievement, support the use of the language experience approach. Linguistically, the language experience approach is recommended because the relationship between oral and written language can be shown best by using the language of children in the creation of reading materials.

However, research investigating the use, the merits, and the limitations of the language experience approach for disadvantaged children is limited and sparse. The purpose of this review is to survey and analyze the available research evidence with both a narrative and a critical review and to identify needed research directions. Not all the research on the language experience approach is cited since the focus here is on the application of this approach for the disadvantaged. However, since culturally disadvantaged children must acquire the same reading skills as other children to become proficient readers, selected research is included here even though particular studies may not have been conducted with culturally disadvantaged populations.

Teaching methodology appropriate to the language experience approach is not discussed since there are extensive descriptions elsewhere (Ashton-Warner, 1963; Hall, 1970; Lee and Allen, 1963; Stauffer, 1970).

This review is intended to provide a research base and interpretation for doctoral students and others interested in research in reading.

Definition of terms

The "language-experience" approach to reading denotes a method of teaching reading in which, during the early phases, reading materials are developed by recording children's spoken language. The content of pupil-created reading materials represents the experiences and language patterns of the reader. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are integrated in language arts and reading instruction.

While many consider the term "culturally disadvantaged" distasteful or inaccurate, it is still the term widely used to designate those who are economically poor and who are usually members of the lower socio-economic class. Language differences and experiential backgrounds unlike those of the school culture handicap the culturally disadvantaged child.

The term "linguistically different" is used currently to describe those children whose native language is not English or those who speak a dialect of English which differs from standard English. In this review, the feature of language difference is given greater attention than other dimensions of cultural disadvantage.

Review of Literature

This review of language experience research cites early reviews and then discusses specific studies which are arranged in chronological order through 1971. The National First Grade Studies are discussed in detail followed by studies beyond the beginning level.

1. Research reviews

In the literature on the language experience approach, three reviews of research are available. Wrightstone concluded in 1951 that language experience material can be used with effective results although he did not discuss the method in connection with disadvantaged children. Wrightstone had concluded in an earlier article (1944) that by the end of the third grade typical children taught systematically by activity related (usually experience oriented) methods, were reading as well as children taught exclusively with basals, when reading achievement was measured by standardized tests.

The second review of research and literature by Hildreth (1965) provides an excellent historical perspective on the evolution of the language experience approach from its classroom origins around 1900 through the studies investigating the approach from 1926 to 1965. The term "experience method" did not appear until 1934, with "language experience" being introduced still later. The name, "language experience approach," did not signify the same instructional program from classroom to classroom or study to study. This variation in program existed in the early studies as it does today.

Of the thirteen studies Hildreth cited only three had culturally disadvantaged children as the subjects. It is interesting to note that

she does discuss the rationale for the language experience approach for the culturally disadvantaged Hildreth repeats the information in the Wrightstone review and adds studies after 1951. She concludes that by the end of third grade typical children taught systematically by experience methods combined with individualized reading were reading as well or better than children taught with basals. Two of the thirteen studies reported negative results with the language experience approach. However, one of those compared an incidental approach with systematic instruction whereas the other studies examined carefully planned and executed teaching of reading within a language experience framework.

The third review appeared in the 1967 conference proceedings of the International Reading Association (Vilscek, 1968). This analytical report concentrated on the language experience projects in the National First Grade Studies. This interpretation of the findings did not concentrate specifically on the disadvantaged, although socio-economic levels were identified in the projects.

Chall (1967) reviewed research on beginning reading from 1910 to 1965 comparing code emphasis approaches and meaning emphasis approaches, but the studies reported do not relate directly to the language experience approach although she describes language experience in a chapter on approaches. Chall's thoroughness is impressive, but the omission of language experience studies indicates the lack of attention to the approach both in instructional programs and research projects. Only two of the studies she reviewed referred to interaction between method and social and economic background. One of these (Gardner, 1942) did compare "formal" and "informal" approaches. The "informal" approach did have similarities to today's language experience approaches.

2. Research studies

The specific studies which the above reviews reported were examined, and those relevant to the culturally disadvantaged are discussed below along with other pertinent research.

One of the early studies (Meriam, 1933) advocated using the language experience approach with Mexican-American children whose background made existing books inappropriate. The language experience approach is being mentioned currently (although not extensively researched) as an approach for Spanish-speaking children whose language and cultural background is different from the language of the school and commercial reading materials (Rosen and Ortego, 1969).

Meriam's research (1933) was a two-year study of eighty primary grade children in a school which placed the instructional emphasis on activities such as construction, handwork, story telling, free reading, and dramatization for functional teaching of reading when needed in conjunction with the activities. Meriam concluded, "In general, the data indicate a highly satisfactory achievement of these pupils." Progress was reported in terms of months of progress on reading tests in comparison with months in school but there was no control group for comparison. Considering that two-thirds of the children had IQ scores below 100, the gains stated are impressive.

In England, Gardner (1942) compared an experience-activity or "informal" approach with a formal approach for a three year period for children from ages five to eight. She reported no significant difference in achievement, in reading, spelling, and punctuation at the end of the three year period. Factors less directly related to the academic instruction such as attitudes, imaginative painting, concentration, and social behavior favored the experimental children. She reported that there was a slight tendency for the experimental pupils to do more poorly than the controls in the lower socio-economic levels, but detailed analysis by socio-economic levels was not a major concern of the study.

It should be remembered that the early research was limited in scope and that close scrutiny shows the studies do not meet many criteria for carefully controlled studies.

Three approaches to the teaching of reading, individualized reading, basal readers and the language experience approach, were studied during the 1959-1960 school year under the Reading Study Project conducted by twelve elementary school districts in San Diego County, California. Sixty-seven teachers participated in the study. This project was the first large-scale one employing the language experience approach, and the general conclusion was that the language experience approach through the first three years of elementary school can be an effective way of teaching reading. The language experience teachers found that children made as much or more progress in the reading skills, as measured by standardized reading tests, as did the children who had direct teaching of skills (Allen, 1962; San Diego Board of Education, 1961).

Brazziel and Terrell (1962) conducted a study in which a six weeks readiness program for one class of twenty-six culturally disadvantaged children emphasized the use of experience charts. These researchers found that experience materials provided meaningful reading content for disadvantaged children when used in connection with other readiness activities and materials. Since this program was a combined one, the effect of the experience materials alone is not known, but the scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test at the end of the study were significantly higher for the experimental group than for three control classes.

In a study of the reading programs of sixty-five school systems throughout the United States, Austin and Morrison (1963) reported that only one school system employed the language experience approach as the major approach to beginning reading although in eighteen school systems experience charts were used in conjunction with basal readers.

Hall (1965) developed and evaluated a language experience approach with culturally disadvantaged Negro children in the Washington, D. C., schools for the first semester of the first grade. There were 151 pupils in the five experimental classes, and 125 pupils in the five

control classes. Significant differences were reported between the groups, favoring the experimental group, in gains made on measures of reading readiness, in word recognition on a standardized reading test, and in sentence reading on a standardized reading test. No significant difference was found in word recognition scores on a test of preprimer and primer vocabulary developed by the investigator. In the analysis of teacher ratings of the two approaches, the language experience approach was rated as significantly more effective than the basal approach, while the teacher's ratings showed no differences in the practicality of the two approaches.

Giles (1966) compared the oral language development of two first grade classes instructed with the language experience techniques with two classes using basals. He concluded that the language experience children made greater gains in oral language than pupils instructed with basals and that the language experience advantage was greater for boys than for girls in developing oral vocabulary.

The doctoral dissertation of Cramer (1968) investigated the spelling ability of first-grade classes which received language arts reading instruction and those which received basal reading instruction. He concluded that the language arts classes spelled regular and irregular words with nearly equal proficiency whereas the basal classes spelled regular words with somewhat greater facility than irregular words. The language arts classes spelled both regular and irregular words significantly better than the basal groups when performance on phonological spelling lists was compared. The language arts classes spelled words in written composition with significantly greater accuracy than the basal reader classes.

Oehlkers (1971) studied the contribution of creative writing performance to the reading achievement of four first grade classes which used the language experience approach. Two experimental classes began creative writing early in the year while the two control classes did not begin creative writing until the second semester. Oehlkers found no significant difference in word recognition scores and

concludes that students who receive early training in creative writing achieve equally well in word recognition as those who concentrate principally on reading activities during the first half of first grade.

Lamb (1971) investigated the effectiveness of the language experience approach in beginning reading with culturally disadvantaged children in five first grade classes in Indianapolis. The achievement and attitudes of the experimental group were compared with the achievement and attitudes of five control classes which used a modified basal reader approach. No significant difference in achievement and attitude were found on the *California Reading Test* and *The Primary Pupil Reading Attitude Inventory*.

Only one descriptive analysis of the reading materials was located – all other studies reported the achievement of children instructed with the language experience approach. Packer (1970) analyzed the vocabulary used in the experience materials of disadvantaged children in Philadelphia; Jacksonville, Florida; Jonesboro, Arkansas; and Yakima, Washington. He compared the "key vocabulary," words children said they wanted to know, with the vocabulary in the preprimers and primers of four basal series. In one of the school systems there was a positive correlation between the key vocabulary and the basal vocabulary but Packer concludes that there is a significant difference between the vocabulary which is meaningful to culturally disadvantaged children and the vocabulary contained in basal readers.

Two recent publications of the International Reading Association (Horn, 1970; Figurel, 1970) on reading and the disadvantaged contain references to the language experience approach but do not report research data, although descriptions of two research projects (Keith, 1970; Goldberg and Taylor, 1970) concerned with the language experience method are included.

3. First grade research studies

A major research investigation in the 1960's was the First Grade Studies sponsored by the U. S. Office of Education. The purpose of these studies was to compare the effectiveness of various approaches in teaching beginning reading. Of the twenty-seven separate projects, six investigated language experience approaches (Hahn; Harris and Serwer; Kendrick; McCanne; Stauffer; Vilscek, Morgan and Cleland, 1966). In addition, another study (Horn, 1966) concentrated on language differences and readiness for culturally different Spanish-speaking children. Of the six dealing with language experience approaches, one (Harris and Serwer) specifically dealt with the disadvantaged. The language experience studies were continued through the second grade and two were reported through the third grade, (Harris and Morrison, 1969, Stauffer and Hammond, 1969).

Hahn (1966) directed the Oakland, Michigan, project which examined the relative effectiveness of three approaches; (a) modified language experience in TO; (b) modified language experience in ita; and (c) basal readers. Results at the end of the first year showed no one method was consistently superior to the other two. The language experience approaches achieved significantly better scores on word reading and on spelling. Children in the groups were matched on socio-economic backgrounds but analysis of this data "failed to add much useful information" (p. 593). Thus, we cannot say how the disadvantaged children fared in the Oakland project.

The CRAFT project (Harris and Serwer) was designed to compare the skills centered approach with the language experience approach for teaching beginning reading to disadvantaged urban children. Within this comparison there were four groups: (a) skills centered, adhering closely to the instruction in manuals; (b) skills-centered using the phonovisual method instead of the word attack lessons in basals; (c) the language experience approach, and (d) the language experience approach with heavy audio-visual supplementation.

Conclusions of this study are that most culturally disadvantaged children can make substantial progress in learning how to read even if their readiness scores are poor and that culturally disadvantaged children can learn to read with the same methods that work with advantaged children.

The basal approach held a slight but not significant lead in achievement at the end of the first grade. The language experience approach with audio-visual supplementation matched the skills centered approach in results and achieved better results than the language experience approach without this addition.

Kendrick (1966) compared the effectiveness of the experience approach with the traditional basal approach. Children's performance was analyzed by high, middle, and low socio-economic levels. He reported that for most of the analyses performed there were no significant differences between the experience approach and the traditional method group. The language experience approach did affect the interest of the lower class males favorably and resulted in significant differences in the number of words in the writing samples of both boys and girls.

The McCanne (1966) investigation dealt with Spanish speaking children in Colorado who were taught by three methods: (a) conventional English readiness and basal reader approach; (b) a modified teaching of reading as a second language (TES ; and (c) language experience approach. His conclusion was that the basal reading approach developed the best achievement in reading skills. He explained the culturaly patterns of these children may be such that free participation in group activities such as discussions is not encouraged. He also believed that teachers may have been unfamiliar and uncomfortable with approaches (a) and (b). He did comment that nothing in his study was unfavorable toward using the TESL and language experience approaches for developing oral English skills and for enriching experience.

Stauffer (1966) compared a language arts approach with a basal reading approach in beginning reading with 433 students in twenty first-grade classes in Delaware. The language arts approach resulted in significantly higher scores on word reading, paragraph meaning, and spelling while no significant differences in word study skills, vocabulary, and attitude were found. The language arts approach pupils did significantly better in writing mechanics, spelling, and number of words used in writing. The language arts pupils scored higher on oral reading accuracy but not on rate. A group of segregated Negro children were included in the experimental group, and these children's scores were lower than the other part of the experimental population but these children were lower in reading readiness and intelligence scores at the beginning of the study.

The Pittsburgh project (Vilscek, Morgan, and Cleland, 1966) compared the achievement of children from three socio-economic levels in a coordinated basal language arts approach with an integrated experience communication approach. The experience group scored significantly higher on word meaning, paragraph meaning, vocabulary and word study, attitude, and on creative writing. The higher socio-economic level children scored higher in reading than those at the middle level, and the middle level children scored higher than the lower socio-economic level. The basal approach resulted in better achievement than the language experience approach for the lower socio-economic boys, but the higher achievement of the boys in the basal group can be attributed to their higher reading readiness scores.

Horn (1966) focused on reading for a group of culturally disadvantaged Spanish-speaking first grade children. Three methods were used: (a) audio-lingual techniques in English with science based materials; (b) audio-lingual techniques in Spanish with science-based materials and (c) readiness techniques recommended by the San Antonio school district.

The stress in the twenty-eight first grade classes was on developing language and experience background. There were no significant

differences in the mean reading scores of the groups taught by the three methods. Horn claims there is a great need for new, more suitable measures of readiness, intelligence, and language competence for Spanish-speaking children.

Five of these first grade projects studying the language experience approach were continued through the second grade and are reviewed below. Two of the projects have been reported through the third grade.

Hahn (1967) reported that at the end of the second grade the language experience pupils in both TO and ita scored better on reading tests than the children instructed with basals.

The CRAFT project extension (Harris, Serwer, Gold, 1967) included 666 children at the end of the second grade. At this time the basal reader group was the highest in word knowledge and spelling although the differences between groups were not statistically significant. Great range was reported within the methods but not between them. The children in the project scored better than comparable children in the experimental schools in second grade classes not in the study.

Vilscek (Vilscek, Cleland and Bilka, 1967) reported that the language experience pupils were higher on tests of spelling and on attitudes but that there were no significant differences on word meaning, word study skills, and language skills.

At the end of second grade, Kendrick and Bennett (1967) reported that in their study twelve of the comparisons made favored the language experience group while eleven favored the traditional method. They found the lower socio-economic boys did better with the language experience approach.

The third grade extension of the CRAFT project in New York City (Harris and Morrison, 1969) and the Delaware study (Stauffer and Hammond, 1969) do not significantly alter the earlier conclusions. The CRAFT third year report again stated that the means *within*

methods differed more than the means *between* methods. In the first and second grades the skills centered approach was slightly higher and in the third year the language experience group was slightly higher in achievement but not significantly so.

In Delaware, the third year language experience classes scored significantly higher on spelling; on accuracy and rate of oral reading; on word recognition; on measures of creative writing such as writing mechanics, spelling, number of running words and different words used; and on number of polysyllabic words. The conclusion was that an eclectic language experience approach will obtain good results in reading throughout the primary years.

In summarizing the language experience and basal comparisons in the Cooperative Research Projects, Bond and Dykstra (1967 b) explained that relatively few significant differences were found between the approaches. The significant differences that did exist generally favored the language experience approach. However, the authors caution that these "... sporadic differences were not of much practical significance in terms of actual reading achievement" (p. 120).

Their analysis of the studies led Bond and Dykstra (1967 b) to these conclusions: (1) The success of the language experience approach indicates that the addition of this approach to a reading program can be expected to make a positive contribution to that program; (2) a writing component is likely to be an effective addition to a primary reading program.

Research beyond the elementary levels

Only three reports of the language experience approach beyond the elementary level were found. Stauffer and Cramer (1967) reported a cooperative venture between the State of Delaware Vocational Education Department and the Reading Study Center of the University of Delaware. This language arts program was designed to improve basic communication skills. Spelling and writing were

correlated with experience stories. Directed reading-thinking activities used with the Rochester Occupational Series were also a part of the language program. There was no evaluation of reading skills although the authors reported that the progress was "often dramatic" when these job training enrollees were given the opportunity to read and write about matters of high personal interest to them. The inservice training was considered a primary objective of the program. While formal evaluation is lacking, the program does provide an example of language experience activities that could be used with adults.

Becker (1970) reported a program with four illiterates ranging in age from 16 to 18 in the Women's Job Training Program in Charleston, West Virginia. The experience accounts used for instruction had a vocational orientation. At the beginning of the program these four subjects were classified as non-readers but after eleven months, their scores on the Spache Diagnostic Reading Scales were 2.8, 3.3, 3.8, and 5.5. Although these scores reflect the lower limits of the standardized test and are not instructional levels, Becker reported that at the end of the project two students were being instructed on a third grade level, one on fourth and one on fifth.

Wilson and Parkey (1970) reported a program in a middle school in Charles County, Maryland, in which one low section of thirty-one rural-disadvantaged and educationally retarded seventh graders were instructed with language experience procedures by three teachers in social studies, science, and math.

Three criteria were used in pretreatment–post-treatment comparison: (1) student self-evaluation, (2) teacher evaluation, and (3) student performance on a test of reading. A control group of seventh graders slightly better than the students in the experimental group was used for the comparison. After the program, students in the experimental group appeared to view themselves more favorably as learners while they rated themselves about the same as readers as they had before the program. Little difference was evident in the reading gains of either group on the only measure of reading achievement, the Botel

Word Opposites test. Teachers' ratings of the children were more favorable at the end of the study for the experimental group and less favorable than at the beginning for the control group. The researchers reported a favorable reaction of the teachers to the accompanying inservice.

Synthesis

The preceding section traces the existing research literature on the language experience approach for the disadvantaged. This section examines the research from a critical viewpoint, assessing knowledge and considering limitations in both coverage and research methodology.

The potential of the language experience approach for the disadvantaged has not been thoroughly explored through research. The research shows that urban disadvantaged children can be taught to read successfully when programs concentrate on their needs. It shows that the language experience approach can be one effective way of teaching reading. The research also offers evidence that teachers can be taught to use the language experience approach.

While research findings are reported traditionally in terms of achievement, there is a need to analyze features of an instructional approach to identify its unique contributions. The following analysis examines specific features of the language experience approach to determine what generalizations can be drawn from the existing research and to provide directions for future study.

The areas of achievement, readiness, creative writing, spelling, oral language, and both pupil and teacher attitudes are examined. The survey of the research reveals a common limitation of language experience approach research: the focus on this approach in beginning reading but a lack of attention to the higher levels of reading achievement and to older students with low reading achievement.

Achievement

In the description of the studies of the narrative review section, general findings on achievement were reported. There is no consistent pattern since the overall effectiveness of the language experience approach is neither overwhelmingly supported nor convincingly rejected.

No one method in the first grade studies was consistently superior, and there was more difference within methods than between methods. Findings on the contributions of language experience to achievement in the areas of vocabulary, word recognition, and comprehension, as measured by standardized tests, cannot be definitely pinpointed from the research.

While the various studies report different conclusions about the effectiveness of the language experience approach for the disadvantaged, the conclusions of Harris and Serwer (1967) that most disadvantaged children can make substantial progress in learning to read in spite of low readiness scores and that they can learn to read with the same methods as middle class children need additional verification.

Readiness

Although the language experience approach is used more at the beginning reading stage than at any other, the use of the approach for developing prereading skills is an area limited in research coverage.

Brazziel and Terrell (1962) reported that the use of experience charts in a readiness program provided meaningful content for the disadvantaged and that the experimental group using charts obtained higher readiness scores on the *Metropolitan Readiness Test* than did the control groups which did not use the experience materials.

Hall (1965) concluded that the language experience approach was

superior to the basal approach in improving reading readiness of culturally disadvantaged pupils, when gains on the Metropolitan Readiness Test were analyzed after a semester of instruction in first grade.

Horn (1966) was concerned with studying the effectiveness of three methods of developing reading readiness in Spanish speaking children. Although the methods he studied were not directly language experience ones, he stated that new readiness programs which stress language development, extension of experiences, and favorable self-concepts are needed.

Bond and Dykstra (1967 a) state that there is some indication that low readiness pupils perform better in a basal program, whereas high readiness pupils are more successful with a language experience program. However, they mentioned that it was possible that sampling problems may have contributed to this tendency.

Creative writing

Creative writing should flourish in the language experience approach which is based on having children express original ideas and which encourages dictation and then independent writing. Yet, the research pays scant attention to performance in this area. In the second year of the Delaware project, Stauffer and Hammond (1967) reported that an analysis of the creative writing performance indicated that the language arts group wrote significantly longer stories, used a significantly more varied vocabulary, spelled significantly more words correctly, and exhibited a significantly better performance in writing mechanics than did the basal reader group. These results suggest strongly that the language arts approach develops a greater facility in written communication than does the basal approach.

Measures of writing were also taken in the other First Grade Studies language experience projects and where reported also favored the language experience groups. Bond and Dykstra (1967 b) report that a writing component added to a regular reading program enhances

achievement in reading. This finding was noted in both the ita projects and the language experience projects, and is supported by the work of Kendrick (1966), McCanne (1966), and Vilscek, Morgan, and Cleland (1966).

Oehlkers (1971) reported that early emphasis on creative writing in first grade resulted in as much achievement in word recognition as early emphasis on reading activities.

Spelling

Cramer (1968) reported better spelling achievement with the language experience approach than in the basal approach.

Stauffer (1966) reported that the language arts pupils in his project of the First Grade Studies spelled significantly better than children instructed with basals. This finding was also confirmed in the second and third years of the study. The other First Grade Studies projects which reported spelling performance found no significant differences between the ita, the language experience, and the basal approach when spelling in ita was accepted for the ita group (Hahn, 1966).

Oral language development

Since the language experience approach stresses integration of oral and written language, it would be interesting to know if the language experience approach does in fact *improve* children's oral language competence as well as their reading achievement. However, the research thus far gives us little information on this factor other than Giles (1966) finding that the first grade pupils using the language experience made greater oral language gains than pupils using a basal approach.

Students' attitudes

Harris (1969) reported striking differences between the skills-

centered and the language experience approaches in the results of positive and negative motivation. At the first grade level, in language-experience classes, positive motivation tended to go with good achievement and negative motivation with poor achievement. In the second grade, positive motivation was associated with good achievement in the language-experience classes and with poor achievement in the skills-centered classes. Negative motivation was associated with poor achievement in both basal and language experience classes.

Wilson and Parkey (1970) were the only researchers to report pupils' self evaluation and while attitudes toward reading were reported in some studies, it is not possible to state a relationship between the language experience approach and attitude toward reading and toward self.

Teachers' attitudes

Teachers' attitudes toward the language experience methods have been studied by several investigators. Lane (1963), Hall (1965) and Stauffer (1966) reported that teachers who used the language experience approach rated it positively in practicality and effectiveness.

Research methodology

Since the research has concentrated generally on the comparison of the achievement of children instructed with the language experience approach with the achievement of children instructed with another method of teaching reading, usually basal readers, the research is subject to the flaws common to many "methods" studies. Those limitations are discussed below:

The name or label given to any instructional program may not adequately describe the actual program or procedures followed. The language experience research is not in each instance reporting the

same type of instructional program. Research reports should include a clear description of the methods so that readers are certain about the program followed. Caution should be exercised in comparing the research on language experience instruction since there is a lack of information about the actual programs followed, and since there is considerable variation in the implementation of language experience techniques. The nature of skill instruction (whether a separate program or integrated with materials created by children), the extent of literature experiences included, and the amount of time spent not only on reading but related language activities in writing, speaking and listening should be specified. In some curriculum projects the language experience approach may be combined with other curriculum components. While an eclectic approach has many advantages, the difficulty of determining whether the features of the language experience approach contributed to pupils' achievement is compounded.

The measures used to determine reading achievement impose limitations on the conclusions to be drawn from a study. When the population studied is the disadvantaged, the limitations of the existing tests are even greater. There is ample evidence that culturally disadvantaged children score poorly on standardized reading tests and verbal intelligence tests. This fact must be taken into consideration in attempting to interpret research on disadvantaged children. Horn (1967) believes that the need for new tests to assess the capabilities, experiential backgrounds, cognitive functioning, and language development for linguistically different children was the most significant implication of his research.

Another limitation is that a number of factors such as the extension of experiential and conceptual backgrounds, motivation, self-concept, teachers' attitudes, and reading attitudes which are influential in learning are not measured by tests.

The existing methods research does not specifically state "why" or for "whom" a particular approach is effective. The research is reported in terms of statistical treatment of achievement scores.

There is a need to go further and to examine why one method proved more effective than another method and to identify pupil characteristics in the areas of personality and learning modalities which may be associated with success in a particular approach.

It is difficult to control the teacher variable in methods studies. The first grade studies showed that the teacher variable seemed to affect achievement more than the specific method used, and greater differences were found within a method than between methods (Bond and Dystra, 1967).

The Hawthorne effect in methods studies may influence results. Since, in many cases, the language experience approach is new to teachers, the Hawthorne effect may weight the results favorably toward this approach. However, unfamiliarity with an approach may make the teacher's job more difficult thereby counterbalancing the Hawthorne effect.

The short time period covered in studies is another drawback to drawing conclusions from the studies about the long range effects of an instructional method. However, the longer the time period of a study the greater the number of variables which cannot be controlled.

Recommendations

The research needs related to the language experience approach for the disadvantaged are many.

In addition to studying the general reading achievement of disadvantaged children instructed with the language experience approach, future research should examine specific facets of reading and language performance.

Since culturally disadvantaged pupils typically score low on readiness tests, attention should be given to readiness needs, and research should be conducted to investigate whether the language experience approach can be utilized effectively to develop specific readiness skills such as oral language facility, left-to-right progression, visual discrimination, auditory discrimination, and the desire to read through meaningful and natural reading-type situations. Teachers may tend to view language experience activities as ones for beginning reading instruction without first diagnosing and evaluating children's readiness and without realizing the potential of the language experience approach to develop essential readiness background.

Since oral communication is a concern of programs for the culturally and linguistically different, both instruction and research need to give attention to the potential of using the language experience approach to encourage and extend oral communication skills. Adequate measures for assessing oral language are especially needed.

Since the language experience approach correlates instruction in writing with reading activities, the outcomes in written language in terms of ideational content, extent of vocabulary, sentence length, and spelling should be investigated.

The work of sociolinguists and psycholinguists lends support to approaches for reading which build upon the existing language performance of the learner and which relate the teaching of reading to the reader's oral language. The linguistic considerations for the language experience approach are related to studying reading as a language processing task. As linguists explore the relationship between the spoken and written forms of language, and as additional information is available on the linguistic nature of the reading process, this knowledge should be reflected in the investigations of the language experience approach. Studies of children's oral reading performance similar to Goodman's (1969) work with miscues could be conducted with the reading of language experience materials. Analysis of the syntax and vocabulary used in children's personally created reading materials should offer pertinent information about children's language.

The need for appropriate instructional programs in both oral and written language for linguistically different children is urgent. Rosen and Ortego (1969) decry the lack of research directed to the "language problem" of Spanish-speaking children. Baratz and Shuy (1969) and Fasold and Shuy (1970) stress the language and reading needs of children who speak non-standard versions of English. Dialect divergence in connection with language experience instruction needs analysis.

Psychological factors such as motivation and pupils' attitudes toward themselves and toward reading also need to be explored in future studies of the language experience approach. Since the language experience approach does stress success and motivation, attitudes of children should reflect positive effects of such emphasis.

The teacher effect variable should be studied in language experience situations. In addition to studying the teacher characteristics and teacher pupil interaction patterns, attention should be given to identifying features of teacher education programs (both preservice and inservice) which contribute to effective reading instruction for disadvantaged children.

The research thus far in the language experience approach has concentrated largely on the beginning reading level. There is need for research beyond the beginning reading stages, in combination with other approaches, and in clinics and other remedial settings.

The future research needs to ask new questions, to move beyond the comparison of one method with another, and to analyze the process as well as measuring outcomes.

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